

September 1, 1982

Recent articles in the daily press on the condition of Newark's public housing give rise to serious and disturbing thoughts. People elected to public office or appointed to boards, authorities and positions of public trust, then speak and act with the authority of position, not necessarily with the authority of competence.

It is customary to accept this authority of position even in the face of manifest incompetence or failure in performance. We accept it for two reasons: one, because, by nature, we are polite and tolerant; two, because we are reluctant to face reality, afraid to challenge authority, to stand up and be counted. Shakespeare wrote, "Thus custom doth make cowards of us all." For a long time, Newark citizens have followed custom and kept silent on the matter of the conduct of the Newark Redevelopment and Housing Authority, but they cannot afford to be afraid of custom any longer.

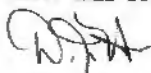
The present situation is not a crisis or an emergency. Reports in the press, personal observation, conversations with tenants of public housing, all lead to the conclusion that the NRHA has continually failed to operate and maintain properly the projects for which it is responsible. The people who speak with the authority of position would have you believe that the sole reason for deplorable conditions is lack of sufficient funds. But the fundamental overriding reasons are: lack of concern in members of the Authority; indifferent and/or incompetent management; lax, less than knowledgeable or non-existent supervision of the work force; and a lack of understanding of the elements of the routine, meticulous maintenance demanded by these projects. All these will persist and remain regardless of the amount of funding.

One-tenth of Newark's population live in public housing. This Council, the Administration, and all citizens who are fortunate enough not to live in public housing have a common responsibility. It is to provide decent housing for those tenants who live decently and, equally, to protect them from those tenants who do not. This is a management responsibility which we have delegated to the NRHA, and it is failing to meet it.

The Authority is being given \$400,000 to hire some firm to study its problem; in other words the Authority will investigate itself. If you believe that anything effective can come from this expenditure, you may also feel that a fox is a proper guardian for a hen house.

What then is our alternative? I point out one of several. Remove this housing from the jurisdiction of the Authority. Employ, under rigid specifications, a competent real estate management firm to manage these projects in the same manner as any other apartment complex. We would get desired results and very probably reduce cost.

In any case, I ask that the competent agency, federal or state, be requested to survey the entire operation of the NRHA, and to document, in detail, the reasons for its manifest failures. I hope this Council can find it proper to make this request.



D. J. Henderson